Ancient Is Modern—Transforming Public Education for Hawaiians

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When it comes to education for Native Hawaiians, ancient is modern. Methods developed, tested, and employed by our ancestors to prepare future generations to thrive in our islands coincide with the latest in twenty-first century educational and neuroscience research. These methods are still the best for growing and maintaining a thriving lāhui.

With the dawn of a new era, tremendous opportunities present themselves to reimagine and redesign public education. In fact, we have entered a highly fortuitous time to operationalize a culturally-driven, family-oriented, and community-based Hawaiian system of public education. As early as 1997, such a system was recommended by the Native Hawaiian Education Council in their federal report. Over thirty years of Indigenous action research by me and others has confirmed that Hawaiian culturally-driven education truly works and positively impacts Hawaiian students on all levels.

Let's face it. The horse has been dead for decades. When I started my DOE career in 1985 as one of the first licensed secondary Hawaiian Language teachers, inequitable numbers of Native Hawaiian students were underperforming, not because they were stupid, lazy, or unmotivated—though that is what they were frequently told—but because the content, instructional methods, and assessments did not align with the needs and propensities of Hawai'i's largest public school ethnic group.

These inequities have not substantially changed over the decades. What has changed is that we know how to educate modern Hawaiians. Building on this research, we can now create a viable, decentralized Hawaiian system of education tailored to the needs, dispositions, and preferences of Hawai'i's host population. This system is currently being advanced by Kū-A-Kanaka, a social enterprise started by my family to revitalize Hawaiian language, culture, and traditions, Kanaeokana, a network of Kula Hawai'i that is strengthening the lāhui and nurturing the next generations of aloha 'āina leaders, and grassroots organizations throughout Hawai'i who are collaboratively growing a community-based education system built on strong Hawaiian language and culture foundations.

Research shows that Hawaiian students do not just prefer culturally-driven education. They *excel* when taught in an atmosphere of aloha, when the curriculum

is relevant to the places they are born and raised in, and when assessments let them demonstrate what they have learned using their unique gifts and talents. I coined this ancient-yet-modern approach to learning: Pedagogy of Aloha, but it is also known as Education with Aloha (EA), Hawaiian Culture-Based Education (HCBE), ʻĀina-based Education, and Hawaiian-focused education. Directly influenced by student feedback, this Pedagogy of Aloha has emerged over the past two decades, and positively impacted tens of thousands of Hawaiian learners of all ages.

Here I present my vision of a Hawaiian model of education called Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao, which I translate as "place of attaining wisdom," as a prototype for intergenerational places of learning that should be established throughout Hawaiʻi, as independent components of a Hawaiian system of education, which advocates decision-making at a local level. This vision aligns with Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning."

Culturally-driven, family-oriented, and community-based, Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao strives for contemporary and traditional rigor in theory and practice. It also helps learners to achieve island sustainability. As a community-based place of learning, Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao is unique—molded by its place, history, and contemporary assets and challenges, and responsive to community wants, needs, and realities.

Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao should be located in areas with high concentrations of Native Hawaiians, and grounded in our Pedagogy of Aloha, which can be described as Relations + Relevance + Responsibility = Rigor + Fun. Based on this formula, Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao focuses on reciprocal relations not just among kānaka, but also with the ʻāina and the spiritual world. Research confirms that in order to be effective, teaching and learning must take place in an atmosphere of aloha, where everyone feels cared for and supported. Utilizing traditional Hawaiian methods of conflict resolution designed to maintain harmonious relations, Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao addresses issues expediently and assures that all feel safe and valued. Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao is affiliation-oriented, with those involved in the educational process constituting an extended, intergenerational family of learners. Students are expected to greet adults and peers as they would family, using terms such as kupuna when talking to elders, and ʻanakala and ʻanakē when addressing teachers, administrators and other adults. Our kūpuna believed that mutual respect readies children for success. This aligns with our research, which confirms that social-emotional balance stimulates the mind and heart, teaches children how to engage in collaborative problem-solving and effective communication, and can reach even the most alienated learners.

Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao curricula are relevant, culturally-driven, and place-based, starting in the community and radiating out in concentric circles. Hawaiian knowledge is the curricular foundation for all content areas, making the curriculum

relevant and personal. Students conduct impactful research in and out of the classroom, and find real world applications for the content explored. For Hawaiians, nature has always been the principal source of knowledge, providing answers for the questions driving kānaka. At Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao, all content is approached through a Hawaiian lens, because for Hawaiʻi's future generations to solve modern challenges, they must understand the dynamics of their place. Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao helps students understand cause and effect within their unique island environment, and their responsibility to apply what they learn to generate positive impacts on a local and global level.

Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao operates on a blended indoor-outdoor ratio, which gives students ample opportunities to develop reciprocal, familial relationships with the land, and prepares them to address modern environmental issues. Providing learners extensive place-based, project-based experiences teaches them how to take care of the land and fosters that deep love for the land known as aloha ʻāina.

Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao is grounded in ancestral wisdom. In-depth knowledge of Hawaiʻi's host culture guides instruction, curriculum, and assessment, as well as behavioral expectations. Students learn by watching and listening when a teacher or master provides instructions and explanations while demonstrating specific tasks. By observing people and natural phenomena, students begin to understand the world around them and prepare to deal with complex ecological issues. Students learn by doing. Teachers introduce new concepts by engaging learners in hands-on application of new knowledge.

As they would be in an extended family, rather than being divided by grade levels, students are mixed together in a multi-age format, teaching each other and learning from one another. Giving older students responsibility to care for younger students lets them show that they can be trusted to mālama their kuleana. This is especially empowering for at-risk students.

Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao values group success over individual achievement. Research confirms that students thrive in non-competitive settings. Moreover, encouraging collaboration prepares students for life at home, at work, and in the community, where such skills are indispensable. Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao also integrates elders, family members, and community experts into the educational process, fostering long-lasting relationships with adults.

Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao teachers have high expectations of their students and set high standards for growth on all levels. Moreover, teachers are extremely creative, making sure that students draw on their strengths and passions as they demonstrate their skills and growth through authentic demonstrations of knowledge, known in Hawaiian as hōʻike.

Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao engages students in real world projects, including internships, service-learning, and mentorships providing authentic experiences. Exploring and solving relevant issues in their families, learning ʻohana, and communities stimulates students' creativity and innovation, critical thinking and

problem-solving, and communication and collaboration. By giving students of all ages opportunities to solve real world problems in their communities, Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao supports them as creators of information, particularly about Hawaiians and Hawaiʻi.

Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao replaces quiet classrooms and lectures with an atmosphere of exuberant discovery, where students and adults are laughing, interacting joyfully, creating art, music, dance, and having fun. Neuroscience research suggests that when students feel minimal stress, information flows freely, assisting students in achieving higher levels of cognition, making connections, and experiencing "aha" moments. In addition, when classroom activities are pleasurable, the brain releases neurotransmitters that stimulate memory centers and increase focused attention.

At Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao, learning is a dynamic, non-linear, spiraling process that builds on past experiences to seek solutions for the future. Employing both contemporary and traditional technologies, learning is practical, skill-oriented, and environmentally-aware, while reflecting, respecting, and embracing Hawaiian cultural values and philosophies that have guided our kūpuna for thousands of years. As an innovative, research-based twenty-first-century model of Hawaiian education, Kīnana Hoʻonaʻauao is ancient and modern, traditional and contemporary, providing learners with opportunities to walk successfully in multiple worlds.

Dr. Kū Kahakalau is a native Hawaiian educator, researcher, cultural practitioner, grassroots activist, and expert in Hawaiian language, history, and culture. After founding and directing the first Hawaiian-focused charter school and teacher licensing program, she is launching EA Ecoversity, Hawaiʻi's first sustainable higher education and career training program.